



Marla Jo McRae

January 15, 1955 - December 9, 2024

After a long battle with cancer, on the evening of December 9, 2024, angels presented Marla Jo with her wings to join her parents, Mac and Pat McRae, and all of her beloved pets she had cared for so deeply. Born on January 15, 1955 in Miles City, MT, she was the first born of 4 children; siblings John, Jim and Nancy were still to come. Mom and Dad ranch raised her first, then introduced her to the hardware store world by moving 8 miles into Ashland. Marla Jo's time in southeast Montana resulted in friends in the Ashland and Lame Deer communities along with enjoying classmates at Colstrip High School and fellow 4H members in the Broadus area. Many hours were spent on the ranch and on the school bus playing card games like Oh Hell, Pinochle, and Cribbage. These environments resulted in the confidence to join the Army (Dad's service) where she was trained in nursing (Mom's profession.) Her time in the Army took her to Fort McClellan, Alabama for basic training, Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, TX for the AIT medic course, Fitzsimons Army Medical Center in Denver, and finally to Fort Sill, Oklahoma. In basic training she found a lifelong friend named Luanna, who we still consider part of our family. After three years of active duty, MJ received her nursing degree from MSU in Bozeman in 1980 and started her career in Helena. She worked as a charge nurse at Shodair Children's Hospital providing psychiatric care for adolescents, gave care and support to pregnant teens and their families at the Florence Crittendon Home, was a geriatric psychiatric nurse at St. Peter's Hospital, and was a favorite nurse at Helena OBGYN. It was in Helena that

she joined the Army Reserves and started a family, with stops in St. Louis (1986-89) and Salt Lake City (1989-91), before returning to Helena. From Nov. 1990 to May of '91, when her children were very young, MJ's unit deployed to Germany to staff military hospitals whose personnel had deployed to the Gulf War. Her Mom, Grandma Pat, went to Salt Lake City to care for Matthew, Marissa and Brianna. MJ also had a two week duty in Panama before retiring from the Army Reserves as a Major. She lived in Helena until 2021, when she and her cats moved to Fort Collins, CO. There she lived with her sister, Nancy, and then in a wonderful senior living apartment complex. Being in Colorado with her daughter and son-in-law, granddaughter and sister was the best medicine ever.

Marla Jo was preceded in death by her parents, Mac and Pat McRae. She is survived by her children; Matthew (Brandi) Gorecki (Malcolm, Franklin, Zoey, Gwyn) of Helena, MT, Marissa (Jim) Corbett (Matilda) of Fort Collins, CO, and Brianna, of Boise, ID; her siblings, John (Kim) McRae, Jim (Cherrie) McRae, and Nancy McRae. She is also survived by her many wonderful cousins, her nieces and nephews, and her cats, Luna and Rem.

We will miss you forever, Marla Jo. Rest easy now. A celebration of life will take place at Lee Cemetery on the Rosebud Creek, south of Colstrip, in the spring or early summer.

The following are thoughts written by Marla Jo's daughters.

Mom was diagnosed with breast cancer two separate times with two different breast cancers. The second time it was metastatic breast cancer with mets to her bones. She fought so hard and tried multiple chemo meds for ten years.

I've never met anyone as strong and as resilient as her. She wanted to be here for her kids more than anything. The way she loved my siblings and I was palpable. She fought so hard to live for us.

She was an RN her whole career. She worked as an RN in the army, labor and delivery, worked with troubled youth and pregnant teens, and worked on the geriatric psych floor at the hospital. She said the best part of being a nurse was helping people. She had the kindest heart and was amazing in her field.

So many people loved her! While my sister and I have been going through her things we are finding letters and notes from friends calling her the "grooviest chick" and saying things like "I adore you." My mom was so loved by her family and friends! Everyone said she was amazing and funny and that she had the best laugh. And even though she was incredibly private, these qualities were still very apparent.

Mom loved gardening! She said there was something so therapeutic about getting her hands in the dirt; in the earth. It felt grounding for her. She adored flowers, plants, animals, and loved being outside. She had an affinity for every kind of rock and gem you could ever possibly name. Seashells came in a close second after rocks. Mom was also very creative and loved arts and crafts and found a love for watercolor painting later in her life.

My mom was a warrior. The bravest and most courageous warrior. She taught me how to be strong. She taught me how to love my daughter. She taught me how to stand up for myself. She taught me how to be a fighter.

*Marissa

Mom's empathetic nature impacted every part of her life. From her work with her countless patients, to her kids, to her closest friends and family, and to all living beings, she had the most caring soul.

She had a love for animals from the beginning. Growing up on the ranch, she was surrounded by animal friends and continued to have animal companions her entire life. She was internally challenged with her family raising cattle and still thought about it as an adult and mother. She eventually adopted a mostly vegetarian diet for both the animals and her health. She regularly donated to several animal welfare and conservation organizations including her local humane society, Defenders of Wildlife, and the ASPCA. Later, during her time in Helena, she fostered kittens for the Lewis and Clark Humane Society, giving them safety and love until they were able to go to their forever homes. Seeing any sick, hurt, or lonely animal affected her deeply and she wanted to help wherever she could.

Her artistic and creative abilities were varied. Sewing clothes and costumes, mending and altering came easily to her. She learned quilting techniques and took sewing classes throughout her life to improve her skills. She loved crafting anything, especially out of used items by recycling and repurposing - she even made a cat tree out of tree branches, old towels, and twine. She picked up watercolor painting later in life as a way to let out emotions. She loved to color intricate mandalas and nature scenes and her doodles could be found on any sort of paper - napkins, bills, envelopes, and notepads.

She also wrote often; keeping in touch with letters to her family and friends

whilst in college, in the army, and traveling, holding onto many of the letters and cards from her loved correspondents. Additionally, journaling was a regular occurrence, including recording her fantastic dreams.

Her Scottish heritage was very important to her. She spent time learning all about Celtic culture, listening to Celtic music, and collecting books on the subject. She had always dreamed of visiting Scotland, especially the McRae castle - the Eilean Donan. Her daughters are planning a special trip to "bring" her there since she never had the chance to go.

Mom's ability to find beauty and value in not obviously beautiful or random things was unmatched. A collector of many things, she treasured rocks, gems, crystals, seashells, notes from teabags, pictures of animals, fabric, her children's school projects, buttons, candy wrappers; you name it, she likely had it. She surrounded herself with items she found beauty in and taught those around her to find joy in the little things. She had her own version of spirituality, believing in angels and likely a higher power, but never forced her beliefs on anyone else. She was content in her own spirituality.

I learned about love, patience, strength, acceptance, and empathy from my mom; she instilled some of my best qualities. She supported me and my siblings the best way she knew how. She will forever be in my heart. I love you bunches, Mom.

*Brianna

Tribute Wall



“ I love the thought of her sisters taking her to Eilean Donan Castle. I've been taking my mom's ashes on trips since she passed 10 years ago.

Valerie Jean - June 15, 2025 at 07:09 PM

MA

“ I'm a cousin. I've know Marla Jo and her family all my life. My mom is Ellen Wallin Smith. She is 95 and is 1st cousin with Mac McRae. My fondest memories is with Marla jo in 4H through Powder River . We went on 4 H exchange trips in the summers. Marla's laugh was contagious. Her love of life and family was amazing. She served our country and I appreciate that. We will miss her. Shes reunited with her parents. ❤️🙏🙏🙏

Marysmithroig - June 07, 2025 at 07:36 PM

KM

“ We will gather at Lee Cemetery on June 22 to remember and celebrate Marla Jo. I will post more information as it is decided. Please join us if you can.

Kim McRae - February 27, 2025 at 03:02 PM

SD

“ Matthew, Marissa, and Brianna and all of Marla Jo's family, I'm so very sorry to hear of your mom's passing. She was such a wonderful neighbor for years. We shared many conversations and fun times. Keeping you all in my thoughts and prayers. Sue Dugan

Sue Dugan - February 26, 2025 at 12:43 PM

NS

“ *Marla Jo will reside in my heart forever. I met her in nursing school in 1978. We shared a love for MT, learning, laughter and conversation. I will always recall her laugh which was infectious. I am lucky to have visited her many times in the last 10 yrs or so as we reunited as friends. MJ, you had a beautiful soul. The world was better because you were in it. I miss you.*

Nancy Stanton - February 06, 2025 at 01:35 PM



“ *3 files added to the album Memories Album*



Bohlender Funeral Chapel - February 06, 2025 at 11:09 AM